Finding the Terrorist: The Never-ending Search for the Radical Profile

Since the time of Napoleon, practices for identifying and profiling the criminal have become increasingly important. The scientific conviction that “the numbers tell the tale” and that “information is power” has become paradigmatic for those who fill state offices of power. One consequence of ramped-up technologies of identification and registration is that, as the methods are increasingly refined and the data available multiplies, the ‘person’—terrorist or otherwise—disappears from sight. This is because in the age of Big Data, the profile, not the person, has center stage. In this paper, we will address the genealogy of profiling anarchists, extremists and terrorists from the 19th century until the present day. We attempt to answer two main questions: Historically, how have politically violent extremists been targeted and predicted—before, during and after violent outbursts of terrorist violence? Why and how has finding the terrorists become the never-ending quest for the holy grail of national security?

Professor Beatrice de Graaf holds the Chair of the History of International Relations at Utrecht University, was co-founder of the Centre of Terrorism and Counterterrorism (The Hague), and studies the history and trajectories of conflict, security and terrorism. Her monograph Evaluating Counterterrorism Performance (2011/2013) was ranked amongst the top 150 terrorism books.

About the Van Tilburg Lecture in Dutch Studies at UCLA
In 2005, Johannes Van Tilburg and his wife, Jo Anne, gave the Dutch Studies Program at UCLA a remarkably generous gift to establish in perpetuity the Johannes Van Tilburg Lecture in Dutch Studies. Mr. Van Tilburg came to the USA from The Netherlands in 1965. In 1971, he became the founding principal of Van Tilburg, Banvard & Soderbergh, AIA and has led this successful firm to the forefront of planning and design. His work is widely recognized throughout the state and indeed the entire country. In 1992, he was honored by his peers and elevated to the level of Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. In 2007, Johannes Van Tilburg was honored as Dutch-American Citizen of the Year by the Netherland-America Foundation of Southern California. In 2010, Mr. Van Tilburg was appointed Honorary Consul of The Netherlands in Los Angeles.

This evening is made possible with generous support from Johannes and Jo Anne Van Tilburg and the Division of Social Sciences in the UCLA College.